

Characteristics of the Discharge in Leviticus 15

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The purpose of this study is to examine the characteristics of the discharge as it is stated in Lev 15:2-15, and to apply the findings to the understanding of the chapter as a whole. Leviticus 15 teaches how the people of Israel can solve the problems of uncleanness resulting from the secretion of liquid out of the human body. Among the several kinds of bodily secretion, the kind described as נֹבַח, “discharge,” in vv. 2-15 is deemed to have been inaccurately identified by some biblical interpreters and translations.

It is observable from the interpretation of commentators that there are basically two views on the characteristics of the discharge with regard to the locus of the discharge in the בָּשָׂר, “body/flesh”; namely, the discharge flows out of (a) the “body” in general or (b) the “sexual organs” in specific. This interpretational issue begins as the topic of the passage in Lev 15:2b (וְאִשׁ אִישׁ כִּי יְהִיָּה נֹבַח מִבְּשָׂרוֹ זָכוּר טָמֵא הוּא), “When any one/person has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean”). The first question is: Is the discharge from (a) the “body” or from (b) the “private parts / penis” as some versions put it?¹⁾ At the same time, some other exegetical questions arise, such as: Is the אִישׁ, “person,” in focus a male or just a human regardless of the sex? What is the nature of this discharge?²⁾

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1) The two views are readily visible from some translations of the passage, as in:

NIV: When any man has a *bodily* discharge, the discharge is unclean.

NJPS: When any man has a discharge issuing from his *member*, he is unclean.

NLT: Any man who has a *genital* discharge is ceremonially unclean because of it.

REB: When anyone has a discharge from his *private parts*, the discharge is ritually unclean.

RSV: When any man has a discharge from his *body*, his discharge is unclean.

TEV: When any man has a discharge from his *penis*, the discharge is unclean,

RSV and NIV opt for the view (a), “body, bodily,” and the others the view (b), “member, private parts, genital, penis.” This difference is evident in a similar manner in the versions of other languages such as French, German, Dutch, and Spanish.

2) J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York; London: Doubleday, 1991), 907.

Commentators seem to agree to understand the זֹב as “a discharge of mucus resulting from a catarrhal inflammation of the ruinous tract” as Noordtzijs puts it.³⁾ As for the locus of the discharge in vv. 2-15, most scholars point to the sexual organs. It means that they take בֶּשֶׂר as a euphemism for genitals. For instance, Hartley comments, “בֶּשֶׂר, ‘flesh,’ is euphemistic for both male and female genitals, here and v. 19”, whereas Péter-Contesse and Ellington state more definitively, “From his body: literally, ‘out of his flesh,’ as in KJV. The word ‘flesh’ or body (RSV) is nothing more than a polite way of referring to the male genital in this context.”⁴⁾ The list of those scholars who present similar interpretations is long.⁵⁾ Furthermore, some scholars assume specifically the discharge to be gonorrhea, whereas some others consider the discharge to include more diverse symptoms than that.⁶⁾ Someone like F. Delitzsch argues that בֶּשֶׂר here is not a euphemism for the genital but refers to the body, yet he still concedes that the discharge is “a secretion from the sexual organs.”⁷⁾

3) A. Noordtzijs, *Leviticus*, Bible Student’s Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1982), 150.

4) J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1992), 203; R. Péter-Contesse and J. Ellington, *A Translator’s Handbook on Leviticus*, Adapted from the French, (New York: United Bible Societies, 1990), 228.

5) See J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*. vol. II (repr., Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), 31; E. S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 198; F. H. Gorman Jr., *Divine Presence and Community: A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 90; R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England and Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 160; J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus* 209; A. ibn Ezra, Jay F. Shachter, Trans., *Leviticus*, The Commentary of Abraham ibn Ezra on the Pentateuch: vol. 3 (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 5746/1986), 74; B. A. Levine, *Leviticus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Pub. Soc., 1989), 93; J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 907; G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 217.

6) Just for a few illustrative comments: G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 208: “In this respect, then, gonorrhea in men and menstrual and other female discharges are viewed as much more potent sources of defilement than others”; J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 907: “Scientific opinion is nearly unanimous ‘that the only illness we know of that can be referred to here is gonorrhea’ (Preuss 1978:410), an identification already made by the LXX and Josephus (*Ant.* 3.261; *Wars* 5.273; 6.426)”; J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 209: “The precise identification of the discharge is uncertain, suggesting that a wide variety of ailments are included in this regulation”; P. J. Budd, *Leviticus*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 215: “Many suspect gonorrhoea is in mind, but the condition need not be limited to that.”

7) C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch* vol. 1 in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the*

Is the above understanding as handed down over centuries truthful to the text in the Hebrew language and to the real-life situation of the ancient Israel? Here, a minimal linguistic overhaul is attempted before considering to accept the traditional understanding of the nature of the discharge. It is now necessary to examine the three lexical items, **איש**, **בשר**, **זוב**, in order to get to a precise understanding of the characteristics of the discharge in Lev 15. In addition, a linguistic analysis of the verb **ירק** is deemed to be useful to shed light on the topic. Thus, we have the following four items to examine:

1. The meaning of **איש** (vv. 2, 5, 16, 18, 24, 33)
2. The meaning of **בשר** (vv. 2, 3, 7, 13, 16, 19)
3. The meaning of **זוב** (vv. 2, 3, 13, 15, 19, 25, 26, 28, 30, 33)
4. Semantic characteristics of the verb **רקק** (v. 8)

1. The meaning of **איש** (vv. 2, 5, 16, 18, 24, 33)

Does **איש** mean “man, male” or “human, person” in these verses, especially in v. 2?

איש has several senses, such as: man, male; husband; person, man, human being; each (one), etc.⁸⁾ It is true that the primary sense of **איש** is “man, male.” However, it is noted that the use of **איש** as “man, male” in contrast to **אשה** as “woman” is rather rare in the Bible and is confined to a certain condition.⁹⁾ Let us take Gen 2:23, the first such use, as an example:

Old Testament in Ten Volumes (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 391-392.

8) The definitions of **איש** in HALOT [L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994-2000)]: 1. **man** (: woman; :: animal; :: God), 2. **husband**, 3. indication of rank: a) the **distinguished people**; b) **governor** of lower rank, 4. **human being**, 5. indicates a position, occupation, public office, 6. **man of God**: prophets, b) in a broader sense: Moses; David; man sent by God, 7. in association with someone: the servants, David’s men, the inhabitants of a town, 8. indicates association within a community: men of Israel; the men of Judah; a man of Israel, 9. **somebody**, impersonal, 10. each, 11. to express reciprocity: each other, 12. every = **each one** in his turn.

9) Out of the total 2,160 occurrences of **איש** in the Hebrew Bible, following the count of HALOT, its usage as “man, male” may not exceed 90 occurrences.

לְזָאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה, כִּי מֵאִישׁ לְקַחְהָ-זָאת

This one shall be called *Woman*,

For from *man* was she taken (NJPS)

It is observable that אִישׁ occurs together with אִשָּׁה in the same passage/context so that it could mean “man, male” rather than “human.” This condition—namely, אִישׁ and אִשָּׁה occur in the same verse or context—is applicable to most other occasions where אִישׁ denotes “male.”¹⁰⁾

As Hebrew is linguistically androcentric,¹¹⁾ אִישׁ, a masculine noun, is employed to express “human being” that involves both man and woman.¹²⁾ Indeed אִישׁ is frequently used to refer to “human” in the Hebrew Bible even if there are terms like אָדָם, “man,” אֲנוּשׁ “man,” and in a lesser sense בֶּן-אָדָם, “son of man,” that generically refer to “human.”¹³⁾ אִישׁ in this generic “human” sense denotes “an individual human being (who is responsible for his/her own life before God).” In this vein, אִישׁ is used in parallel with אָדָם and בֶּן-אָדָם, as in Num 23:19,

10) Occasions of co-occurrence of אִישׁ and אִשָּׁה in the same verse: Gen 2:23; Exo 11:3; 20:28, 29; 21:28, 29; 36:6; Lev 13:29, 38; 19:20; 20:13, 18, 27; Num 5:6, 30, 31; 6:2; 25:8, 14; Deu 15:2; 17:2, 5; 22:13, 18, 22, 25, 29; Jdg 13:6, 10; Rut 3:8; 1Sa 15:3; 25:3; 27:9, 11; 2Ch 15:13; Est 4:11; Job 14:1; Jer 44:7; 51:22; Eze 18:5.

11) NT Greek follows the same androcentric characteristics. E.g. Apostle Paul addresses “brothers” while he was addressing the whole congregation, in 1Co 1:10, Phm 1:12, Col 1:2.

12) The reason for the linguistic androcentrism of Hebrew may be iconic, reflecting the reality in the order of the creation of human beings. That is, the first human Adam (אָדָם) was a man (אִישׁ)/male (זָכָר) and in the beginning he represented both human and male before and after he was joined by his wife Eve. There are languages are likewise androcentric. Take English as an example: “Man” means both “male” and “human”, while “woman” means “female” only. The three concepts “(1) human—(2) male, (3)—female” are encoded by two terms, “man” and “woman.” On the other hand, there are languages in the world that distinguish lexically the three concepts, such as Greek *ανθρωπος—ανηρ—γυνή*. Turkish *kisi—adam—kadın*, Chinese *ren (人)—nin (男)—nu (女)*, Korean *saram (사람)—namja (남자)—yeoja (여자)*, each in the order of (1) human—(2) male, (3) —female.

13) אֲנָשִׁים the plural of אָדָם, is used primarily as “people” rather than as “males”. Cf. P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996), § 99b. However, in case it is vitally important that the person in discussion involves both man and woman, the noun נַפְשׁ, “soul, person,” is used to leave no room for misinterpretation, as in: Lev 20:6

וְהִנֵּפֶשׁ אִשֶּׁר תִּפְנֶה אֶל-הָאֵבֶת וְאֶל-הַדְּעִימִים לְנֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְנִתְּתִי אֶת-פְּנֵי בִנְפֶשׁ הַהוּא וְהִכַּרְתִּי אֹתוֹ מִקְרֵב עַמּוֹ

“If a *person* turns to mediums and wizards, playing the harlot after them, I will set my face against *that person*, and will cut him off from among his people.”

לא אִישׁ אֵל וְיִכְתֹּב וּבִכְאֲדָם וַיִּתְנַחֵם

God is not *man*, that he should lie,
or a *son of man*, that he should repent (RSV)

In this verse it is obvious that אִישׁ, forming a word-pair with בֶּן־אָדָם, means “a human being” rather than “a male.” In Lev 15:2, אִישׁ does not appear together with אִשָּׁה in the same verse or context until the end of the two major topical units, (A) vv. 2-15, and (B) vv. 16-17. אִישׁ occurs together with אִשָּׁה only in v. 18 where אִישׁ refers to “a male.”

In Lev 15, the noun אִישׁ occurs altogether six times, in vv. 2, 5, 16, 18, 24, 33, leaving out its referential occurrences in pronominal forms in the verbs and noun phrases. Let us briefly confirm the identity of each of these six occurrences. The אִישׁ in v. 2 is the one who is sick with the discharge. The אִישׁ in v. 5 is any other person who may be physically close to the sick one. The אִישׁ in v. 16 refers to yet another person who had the emission of semen, thus, it is clear that this person is “male.” The אִישׁ in v. 18 is clearly “a male” as a sexual partner to the אִשָּׁה. So are the אִישׁ in vv. 24 and 33 “a male” as they occur together with אִשָּׁה in the same verse. Note that in v. 24 the אִשָּׁה is embedded in the pronominal prepositional phrase אִתָּהּ, “with her.” Again the issue is: Is the אִישׁ in vv. 2 and 5 referring to a male person or a human being in general? In another respect, if we suppose that the אִישׁ here refers to a male alone, then a new question arises: If a woman, say the sick person’s mother or wife, touches his bed, will she be not unclean? Of course, she will be unclean. Interpreters of this passage need to holistically visualize a real-life situation with the very real-life problem of pathogenic pollution among the Israelite community and the many real-life participants to handle the situation. Then, it looks not so hard to understand that the אִישׁ in vv. 2 and 5 refers to any person, whether a man or a woman.

It is also important to note that אִישׁ is used to form discourse-marking constructions that distinguish discourse units. In Lev 15, at least three or four discourse-marking features are identified from the Masoretic text: (a) the topical discourse phrases, אִישׁ אִישׁ כִּי (v. 2), אִישׁ אִשָּׁה (v. 6), אִישׁ כִּי (v. 16), אִשָּׁה אִשָּׁה (v. 18), אִשָּׁה כִּי (vv. 19, 25), זוּת תּוֹרָה (v. 32), (b) change of topic, (c) change of

participants, and additionally (d) the extra-textual Masoretic paragraph markers, i.e. **ס** (*setûma*) at the end of the unit vv. 1-15 and **פ** (*petûḥa*) at the end of the units vv. 16-17, vv. 18-24 and vv. 25-33. Obviously vv. 1-15 forms a major discourse unit, marked by the topical discourse phrase **כִּי אִישׁ אִישׁ כִּי**, the topic “discharge and uncleanness”, the several participants, and the use of the Masoretic paragraph marker **ס** (*setûma*) at the end of v. 15. (As for the overall structure of the chapter, see section 5 below, “The implications of the characteristics for the discharge in the structure of Lev 15.”)

אִישׁ is used in Lev 15 in three types of constructions, using the topical discourse phrases: (i) **כִּי אִישׁ אִישׁ** + subordinate clause (v. 2), (ii) **אִישׁ אִשֶׁר** + relative clause (vv. 5,33), (iii) **כִּי אִישׁ** + subordinate clause (v. 16). The symantic and syntactic features of these constructions need to be examined in order to clarify the identity of the **אִישׁ** in the topical verse 2b.

1.1. **כִּי אִישׁ אִישׁ** + subordinate clause (v. 2)

The syntactic construction—**כִּי אִישׁ אִישׁ** + subordinate clause—is used four times in the Bible (Lev 15:2; 24:15; Num 5:12; 9:10). First, let us have a look at the passages other than Lev 15:2. In Lev 24:15, **אִישׁ אִישׁ כִּי־יִקְלֹל אֱלֹהֵיו וְנִשָּׂא חַטָּאוֹ**, “*Anyone (אִישׁ אִישׁ) who curses God shall bear the sin,*” the one (**אִישׁ אִישׁ**) who is guilty of cursing God can be both man and woman. The spirit of the law is not limited to the “male folks” alone. How can it be that a woman who curses God will not be guilty?¹⁴ Thus, **אִישׁ** here refers to both male and female individuals. In Num 5:12, **אִישׁ אִשׁתּוֹ כִּי־תִשָּׁטֵה אִשְׁתּוֹ וּמַעַלָּה בּוֹ מַעַל**, “*If any man’s (אִישׁ אִישׁ) wife (אִשְׁתּוֹ) goes astray and is unfaithful to him,*” **אִישׁ** is used together with **אִשָּׁה** (appearing as **אִשְׁתּוֹ**, “his wife/woman”). **אִישׁ** in this context means “a male person” or “a husband” in contrast to “a woman”, as explained above. In Num 9:10, **אִישׁ אִישׁ יִכִּי־הִיהֶ־טָמֵא לְנַפְשׁוֹ**, “*When any (אִישׁ אִישׁ) of you or of your posterity who are defiled by a corpse or are on a long journey,*” **אִישׁ אִישׁ** here is used in the same way as in Lev 24:15 and refers to any person—whether male or female—who

14) The same principle is applied to the recipient of most other laws including the Ten Commandments. In many cases the recipient is **אַתָּה**, “you,” second personal masculine singular. For example, it is not that only gentlemen should not steal but ladies should feel free to steal because **לֹא תִגְנוֹב**, “You shall not steal” (v. 15), literally is directed to “you,” a man.

contacted a corpse.

The noun phrase **איש איש** itself without **כי** is used 16 more times.¹⁵⁾ This phrase with the repetition of **איש** indicates “a distributive sense”, or it is an idiomatic phrase meaning “each (one), any (one).”¹⁶⁾ The person in discussion can be male according to the situation, as in Num 1:4, **ואתכם יהיו איש איש למטה איש ראש לבית-אבתיו הוא**, “And there shall be with you *a man from each tribe*, each man being the head of the house of his fathers.” Here “a man from each tribe (**איש איש למטה**)” happened to be a male; however, the emphasis was on the distributive sense, “each,” rather than the person’s being male. It is clear now that **איש איש** basically means “each (one), any (one)” regardless of sex. In this way it is natural to understand **איש איש** in Lev 15:2 as “any one” out of both men and women among the congregation of Israel. On the other hand, the phrase **אשה אשה**, the feminine equivalent of **איש איש**, is never used in the Hebrew Bible.

The particle **כי** in **איש איש כי** constructs the conditional clause (or protasis) in the text of case laws; i.e. it expresses “if” or “when” in “if/when a person does X” clauses. There are three types with **כי** that construct the protasis in the text of case laws: (a) **איש איש כי**, (b) **איש כי**, (c) **אשה כי**. In these occasions, the **כי**-conditional clause is considered as a specialized discourse device to introduce the topic of the case laws. It means that the construction “**איש איש כי** + subordinate clause” introduces the topic of the text. In the case of Lev 15:2b **איש איש כי יהיה זב מברשו**, **זב**, “discharge,” and **אמט**, “uncleanness.”

If **איש** in v. 2b should be taken as “a male person” rather than “any person in general,” then **בני ישראל** in v. 2a should also be taken as “the sons of Israel” excluding “the daughters of Israel,” the primary sense of **בן** being “son”, rather than “people/children of Israel.” But, **בני ישראל**, the audience for the regulations in Lev 15:2-15, must include both men and women, while the regulations in vv. 19-30

15) Lev 17:3, 8, 10, 13; 18:6; 20:2, 9; 22:4, 18; Num 1:4, 44; 4:19, 49; 1Ki 20:20; Eze 14:4, 7.

16) See W. Gesenius and E. Kautzsch, eds., *Gesenius' Hebrew grammar*, 2nd ed., rev. from the 28th German ed., A. E. Cowley, trans. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1910), §123c-d; P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, § 147d. See also the 10th and 12th meaning of **איש** in HALOT: “10. each: each man ... everyone; 12. every = each one in his turn: ... every man, whoever he may be.”

specifically are directed to women. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider **איש איש** in v. 2 as referring to the Israelites as a whole rather than the males among them only.

1.2. **איש אשר** + relative clause (vv. 5, 33)

This construction—**איש** with the relational particle **אשר**—is used 103 times in the Hebrew Bible, usually forming restrictive relative clauses. In comparison with the more specialized **כִּי איש איש** construction, **איש אשר** expresses the situation or status of the person generically without a distributive sense. In v. 5, **איש אשר** describes “any one/human who” is close to the sick person with discharge and touches the sick one’s bed. That undesigned character of the person near the sick one continues in vv. 6-7. However, the **איש** with this construction in v. 33 is a male as he appears together with a woman, “lies with a woman.” In short, **איש** in this construction also can refer either to a human being in general or to a male.

1.3. **איש כי** + subordinate clause (v. 16)

As explained in section 1.1 above, **כִּי**-conditional clauses express the topic in the text of case laws. This is true with all the 18 occurrences of the **כִּי איש** construction in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁷⁾ **איש** occurs only once in this construction, which means that **איש** here does not hold a distributive sense but indicates the unspecified nature of the person in focus. In v. 16, the **איש** with the emission of semen could be any adult male, given the nature of the topic.

2. The meaning of **בשר** (vv. 2, 3, 7, 13, 16, 19)

What is the meaning of **בְּשָׂר**? Does **בשר** in v. 2 in particular connote “body” in general or “genital” in specific?

HALOT suggests 9 senses of **בשר**, which is used 266 times in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁸⁾

17) **כִּי איש** construction (18x): Lev 13:29, 38, 40; 15:16; 19:20; 22:14, 21; 24:17, 19; 25:26, 29; 27:2, 14; Num 5:6; 6:2; 27:8; 30:3; Eze 18:5. Cf. **כִּי אשר** construction (9x): Lev 12:2; 13:29, 38; 15:19, 25; 20:27; Num 5:6; 6:2; 30:4.

18) **בשר** in HALOT: 1. skin, 2. flesh, 3. meat, food, 4. sacrificial meat, 5. flesh as part of the body

בשר refers most frequently to “flesh” or “body.” Its use as a euphemism for the genital is rare, occurring some five times: Gen 17:15; Ex 28:42; Lev 15:19; Eze 16:26; 23:20.

The question is: Does בשר in Lev 15:2, 3, 7, 13, 16 refer to the male genital, as many scholars suggest?¹⁹⁾ Most commentators concede that בשר in v. 7 cannot reasonably be the genital, והנגע בכשר הזב יכבס בגדיו ורחץ במים וטמא עד-הערב, “And whoever touches *the body* (בשר) of him who has the discharge shall wash his clothes (v. 7).” בשר in vv. 13 and 16 looks even less likely to refer to the male genital. See v. 13, וכי־יטהר הזב מזובו וספר לו שבעת ימים לטהרתו וכבס בגדיו ורחץ בשרו, “And when he who has a discharge is cleansed of his discharge, then he shall count for himself seven days for his cleansing, and wash his clothes; and he shall bathe *his body* (בשרו) in running water, and shall be clean,” and v. 16, ואיש כִּי־תצא, ממנו שכבת־זרע ורחץ במים את־כָּל־בשרו וטמא עד־הערב (כל־בשרו) “And if a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe *his whole body* (כל־בשרו) in water, and be unclean until the evening.”

Now, what is the exact meaning of בשר in vv. 2 and 3? In brief, there are no clear reasons to see בשר as “genitals” in these verses. Genitals as part of the body are included in the body, of course, but בשר in vv. 2 and 3 is to be taken more naturally as the generic “flesh/body.” If we examine the five occasions (Gen 17:14; Ex 28:42; Lev 15:19; Eze 16:26; 23:20), where בשר apparently connotes genitals, they have clear circumstances in common that facilitate such an understanding. That is to say, Gen 17:14 is about the institution of circumcision; Ex 28:42 is about the underwear for the priests in order to cover the “body/flesh”; Eze 16:26 and 23:20 describe the physical features of Egyptians. By contrast, Lev 15:2-3 or 15:2-15 does not apparently have such circumstances if we approach the text objectively. The view that Lev 15:2-3 or 15:2-15 does have such circumstances, thus yielding the sense “genital” out of בשר, stems from the traditional interpretation of the text and from the misunderstanding about the nature of the combination of בשר and זוב.

The handed-down misunderstanding about the combination of בשר and זוב is

(euphemic for the pubic region), 6. body 7. relatives, 8. living flesh: what is frail / transient, 9. all flesh, man and beast; mankind, animals, any human being.

19) An example among the many scholars: A. ibn Ezra, *Leviticus*, 74, “**from his flesh** a euphemism for the male genitalia.”

further clarified by explaining the meaning of זֹבַח in section 3 below. In short, there is no firm ground that the discharge is due to disorders in male sexual organs. We have already noticed from section 1 that the person (אִישׁ) in question in vv. 2-3 cannot be exclusively referring to male folks. It is concluded that בָּשָׂר in vv. 2-3 refers to the body in general rather than genitals.

In sections 3 and 4 below, we will study two more words in order to further identify the circumstances of this case law.

3. The meaning of זֹבַח (vv. 2, 3, 13, 15, 19, 25, 26, 28, 30, 33)

What is the meaning of זֹבַח which is commonly translated as “discharge”? Does it refer to “pathological liquid (coming out of the body)” or more specifically “pus or any polluted fluid out of genitals caused by something like gonorrhoea”?

A generic definition of זֹבַח is the “mucous discharge of a person.” Meanwhile, HALOT suggests two senses for זֹבַח: “1. **discharge** from a man's private parts, blennorrhoea (*gonorrhoea benigna*) Lev 15:2f, 13, 15, 33; 2. **haemorrhage** from a woman during menstruation and at other times Lev 15:19, 25f, 28, 30.” Its cognate verb זָבַח has four senses: “1. to **flow**: water, Isa 48:21, 2. to flow, **drip** with some fluid, Ex 3:8, 3. to **suffer a discharge**; of a man (gonorrhoea), Lev 15:2, 4. **?flow away**, ebb, Jer 49:4.” HALOT explains that the noun זֹבַח in Lev 15:2-3 specifically means in the sense 1 “discharge from a man’s private parts” and the verb זָבַח means in the sense 3 “to suffer a discharge; of a man (gonorrhoea).” Is this a correct understanding?

The noun זֹבַח together with its cognate verb זָבַח is extensively used in Lev 15: The noun זֹבַח – 10x (vv. 2, 3, 15, 19, 25, 26, 28, 30, 33), the verb זָבַח 12x (vv. 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 19, 32, 33). That is to say, its meaning is vital in understanding the message of the chapter. Indeed the concept of זֹבַח contributes to the topic of Lev 15. Its topic is how to deal with the pollution of the living environment owing to the flow of the bodily discharge which contains pathogenic germs and with the resultant transfer of uncleanness that would threaten life in the end. The noun טִמְאָה, “uncleanness,” and its cognate adjective and verb טָמֵא, “(be) unclean,” occur 35

times in Lev 15. “Uncleanness (טמאה)” is the most frequently used concept in the chapter and thus it consists the topic of the chapter. The means by which the topical טמאה is transferred from a person to another is זוב, the discharge of unclean bodily liquid. In this sense, Lev 15 may be called the Chapter of Discharge and Uncleanness (פרק זוב וטמאה). These two concepts appear together as a word-pair (זוב || טמאה) in vv. 2 and 33, thus also forming a complete unit out of the chapter as an inclusio structure.

It is noted that there are three kinds of זוב in Lev 15: (i) a generic discharge of mucus from the body due to external wounds or internal disorder, in vv. 2-15; (ii) menstrual discharges of women, in vv. 19-24; (iii) discharges of women due to gynecological disorders, in vv. 25-30. On the other hand, the emission of semen (שכבת-זרע) of a man—on his own (in v. 16-17) or during the sexual intercourse with a woman (in v. 18)—is not described as זוב, i.e. it is not considered an unclean discharge.

What is the cause of the זוב? Taking the result of the study in sections 1 and 2 into consideration, it is not accurate to identify the cause of the discharge exclusively with the internal disorder in men’s genitals as commentators often put it.²⁰⁾ The cause of the discharge from the flesh/body can be diverse, both external and internal. External wounds and bruises caused by accidents can result in the discharge of blood and other fluid from the body and then of pus when festered. The normal healing process for external wounds, if not deep and grave, would take a week or so, and it is compatible with the period of restoration in vv. 13-15. Various kinds of internal disorders can also certainly cause discharges: diseases such as gonorrhoea, urethritis, dysentery, diarrhea, tuberculosis, pneumonia, bronchitis, asthma, influenza, eye disorders such as keratitis, ear disorders such as tympanitis, etc. These kinds of illness and disorders usually produce pathological fluid that finds channels to flow out of the body. Such unclean fluid may be pus, contaminated blood, spittle, phlegm, slime, nose running, etc. The channels for the discharge can be not only genitals but also all other openings of the body such as mouth, nose, eyes, ears, and anus as well as open wounds. All the liquid discharge

20) As an example, J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 209: advanced much to ascertain, “The first is a seepage from his genitals... the entire chapter is concerned with discharges from the genitals.”

drops/drips, naturally according to the law of gravitation, to the “bed on which he who has the discharge lies ... and everything on which he sits (כל־המשכב אשר ישכב) (עליו הזב ... וכל־הכלי רשא־ישב עליו) (v. 4).

In this respect, the clause *איש איש כי יהיה זב מבשרו* in Lev 15:2 can be understood more properly like “When any person has a discharge from his body” rather than “When anyone has a discharge from his private parts” (REB), “When any man has a discharge from his penis” (TEV), or “Any man who has a genital discharge” (NLT) along with other similar interpretations. These three versions take the three nouns, *איש*, *בשר*, and *זב*, each in a narrow and specific meaning: (i) *איש* as “male” instead of “human, person”, (ii) *בשר* as “genital” instead of more generic “body, flesh”, (iii) *זב* as with a limited connotation. As a result the intended meaning of the text is narrowed down and led to a misunderstanding. Nevertheless, no one can say these interpretations are outright wrong, since the *זב* from the *בשר* of the *איש* still includes something like “a discharge from the male genital.” This understanding is only fractionally accurate.

Furthermore, it may be added that the description of *זב* in HALOT is partially inaccurate. It overfocused on the “discharge from a man’s private parts, blennorrhoea (*gonorrhoea benigna*).”

4. Semantic characteristics of the verb *רקק* (v. 8) and linguistic iconicity principles

The verb *יִרֶק* ($\sqrt{\text{רקק}}$), “spit,” in v. 8 is used only once in the Bible in this root form. Verse 8: *וכִי־יִרֶק הזב בטהור וכבס בגדיו ורחץ במים וטמא עֲד־הערב*, “If one with a discharge spits on one who is clean, the latter shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening.” The verb *רקק* encodes the action to spit out the spittle or other liquid such as phlegm out of the mouth. The liquid spit from one’s mouth is considered unclean by others. It is even more so when the spitting is done by the person with a discharge, i.e. a sick person secreting pathogenic germs from his body. We can easily determine that the spitting person should not be confined to male folks alone, as women’s spitting can be no less impure.

Here, it is useful to look closely at the form of the verb. A medical linguist or linguistic physician would detect that the sick person is spitting out of respiratory or other internal disorders rather than out of usual occasions. This diagnosis is due to the geminate form of the verb רִקֵּק.

The action “to spit” is described three times in the Hebrew Bible (Lev 15:8; Num 12:14; Deu 25:9). There are two root forms used: (i) יִרֵק (Num 12:14; Deu 25:9), an I-*yod* verb, and (ii) רִקֵּק (Lev 15:8), a geminate verb. In most cases commentators do not differentiate these two verb forms. What is the difference between these two verb forms that are alleged to have stemmed from the same origin?²¹⁾ There must be some difference no matter how minimal it may be. Here, the concept of *iconicity principles* in language can be applied to determine the aspectual difference between these two verb forms.

The iconicity principles in language suggest that there are close resemblance between the form (‘the signifier’) and the concept/meaning (‘the signified’) in the language.²²⁾

In general, geminate verbs in Hebrew are understood as having the iterative/repetitive aspect within themselves.²³⁾ An internal repetitive aspectual quality is iconically evident from most geminate Hebrew verbs. Take some verbs as examples, גָּזַז ‘shear’, דָּקַק ‘grind’, זָמַמ ‘think’, זָקַק ‘refine’, חָגַג ‘celebrate a festival’, טַפַּפ ‘walk with short steps like children’, כָּתַת ‘crush by beating’, לָקַק ‘lick’, נִצַּצ ‘blossom’, סָרַר ‘be stubborn’, פָּרַר ‘split’, רָשַׁש ‘beat down’, שָׁלַל ‘plunder’. The internal nature of all these verbs seems to have a repetitive quality.

21) HALOT: (1) 8999 רִקֵּק an onomatopoeic word from an original form raq, which then appears as a vb. in various forms in Heb. → I יִרֵק ; רִקֵּק and רִיק; (2) 4000 יִרֵק: alt. form of רִקֵּק; JArm.^b (?) to spit out, Eth. *waraq*; Arb. *fiq* saliva.

22) Iconicity in languages is a different viewpoint from the general linguistic view of F. de Saussure that the relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Iconicity is observed from onomatopoeic words in most languages: e.g. cuckoo, jingle. Iconicity is observable in the areas of phonology, morphology and syntax, and semantics is closely related in all these areas. W. Frawley, *Linguistic Semantics* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1992), 7: “In short, meaning is a transparent relation between signifier and signified.”

23) R. L. Trask, *A Dictionary of Grammatical Terms In Linguistics* (London: Routledge, 1993), 131: “It is suggested that the ordering of tense, aspect and mood markings with respect to a verb stem is most often iconic: aspect, which is conceptually most tightly bound to the verb, is morphologically marked closest to the verb stem.” This is true with the Hebrew geminate verbs, as the iterative/repetitive aspect is encoded intrinsically and iconically in the second and third radicals.

By the forms of the verb, ירק indicates the non-repetitive, punctiliar aspect; on the other hand, ררק with the double ק iconically indicates the repetitive/iterative aspect.²⁴⁾ From this perspective, two types of spitting can be determined: (i) non-repetitive, occasional spitting expressed by ירק, (ii) repetitive spitting by ררק. The type (i) is used in Num 12:14 and Deu 25:9, where the verb describes a common action that one person spits on the face of the other in order to show openly his/her sense of contempt for the other. The spitting action here is understood to happen once. The type (ii) is used in Lev 15:8. The cause of the repetitiveness of the spitting can be inner disorders, especially respiratory diseases, of the person. The object of the spitting may be not only spittle but also phlegm, blood and other polluted liquid. Any one who has been spitted upon with such a liquid obviously needs to cleanse himself/herself by bathing and also washing the clothes.

The use of the geminate verb ררק in Lev 15:8 expressing the repetitive spitting of the sick person further clarifies the characteristics of the discharge; i.e. it includes all kinds of polluted liquid out of openings of the body.

5. Implications of the characteristics of the discharge for the structure of Lev 15

The characteristics of the discharge as examined above shed light on how to understand the overall structure of Lev 15. The structure of the chapter has been identified largely identically by most scholars. Three typical models are shown diagrammatically below.

24) Cf. J. Bybee, R. Perkins and W. Pagliuca, *The Evolution of Grammar: Tense, Aspect, and Modality in the Languages of the World* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 160, 162, 169: There are many languages of the world that express the repetitive/iterative or habitual aspect by the reduplication of the verb forms. To name a few such languages: Alawa, Tanga, Trukese, Rukai, Mwera, Uighur, Tok Pisin. Examples from Mwera, a language in Tanzania (the verb reduplicated as a whole): *lya* 'eat', *lyalyalya* 'eat and eat and eat'; *jenda* 'travel', *jenda-jenda* 'wander about'. Examples from Pangasinan, a language in the Philippines (the verb reduplicated partially): *manbasa* '(will) read', *manbasabasa* 'reading anything and everything'; *manpasiar* 'go around', *manpasiarpasiar* 'go around all over the place, with no special destination in mind'.

The structure of Lev 15 by Milgrom:²⁵⁾

- A. Introduction (vv 1-2a)
 - B. Abnormal male discharges (vv 2b-15)
 - C. Normal male discharges (vv 16-17)
 - X. Marital intercourse (v 18)
 - C'. Normal female discharges (vv 19-24)
 - B'. Abnormal female discharges (vv 25-30)
- [motive (v 31)]
- A'. Summary (vv 32-33)

The structure of Lev 15 by Hartley:²⁶⁾

- A Introduction (vv 1-2a)
 - B Abnormal discharges from a male's genitals (vv 2-15)
 - C Normal discharges from a male's genitals (vv 16-17)
 - D Sexual intercourse (v 18)
 - C' Normal discharges from a female's genitals (vv19-24)
 - B' Abnormal discharges from a female's genitals (vv 25-30)
- A' Concluding exhortation and summary statement (vv 31-33)

The structure of Lev 15 by Sherwood:²⁷⁾

	<i>verses</i>	<i>duration</i>	<i>gender</i>	<i>physiological integrity</i>	<i>systemic function</i>
A	vv. 2b-15	long term	male	abnormal	abnormal
B	vv. 16-17	transient	male	typical	dysfunctional
C	vv. 18	intercourse	male/female	normal	normal
B'	vv. 19-24	transient	female	typical	dysfunctional
A'	vv. 25-30	long term	female	abnormal	abnormal

25) J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 905.

26) J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 206.

27) S. K. Sherwood, *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, BERIT OLAM Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 69.

As in the above examples, commentators usually see a chiasmic pattern in Lev 15. Wenham notes, “The balance and symmetry of the arrangement is striking. Two types of discharge, long-term and transient, are distinguished. Since they can affect both sexes, that gives four main cases. It should also be noted that the discharges of women are discussed in the reverse order to those of men. This gives an overall chiasmic pattern (AB-BA).”²⁸⁾

This modern understanding of the structure broadly follows the section divisions made by the Masoretic scribes. It seems that they have divided the text according to two factors: (i) the use of the discourse-marking constructions, (ii) the topic of each unit. According to the Masoretes Lev 15 has four units:

	<i>verses</i>	<i>topical discourse phrase</i>	<i>paragraph marker</i>
A	vv. 1-15	אִישׁ אִישׁ כִּי	(ס)
B	vv. 16-17	אִישׁ כִּי	(פ)
B'	18-24	אִשָּׁה אִשָּׁה	(פ)
A'	25-33	אִשָּׁה כִּי	(פ)

The only difference is that modern scholars fixed the topic of the unit A as “male discharges” or “discharges from a male’s genitals”, whereas the Masoretes put the paragraph markers ס and פ which of course goes without specifying the sex of the people in focus. Now, modern commentators’ structural understanding is correct as far as the formal aspect of grammatical gender distinction is concerned; i.e. “male (אִישׁ)” in vv. 2-17 (AB in Sherwood’s structure) and “female (אִשָּׁה)” in vv. 19-30 (B'A') with both “male and female” in v. 18 as the structural center (C). However, according to our semantic analysis of these words in the above, the reality cannot be that straightforward. Namely, אִישׁ אִישׁ in the unit A, though “man man” literally, is an idiom referring to not only male but also any individual person regardless of sex. The words אִישׁ and אִשָּׁה in the other units, B, C, B', A', denote “male” and “female” true to their formal gender distinctions.

28) G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 217.

Taking all the research result in the above, the structure of Lev 15 may be described as the following:

1-2a	Introduction
2b-15	Uncleanness of a human being due to discharges from the body
2b-3	Basic description of the uncleanness
4-12	Ways of transferring the uncleanness and how to solve the uncleanness
13-15	The procedure for restoration when the discharge is healed
16-17	Uncleanness of a man due to normal male emission of semen
18	Uncleanness of both man and woman due to intercourse
19-24	Uncleanness of a woman due to menstrual discharges
19a-c	Basic description of the uncleanness
19d-24	Ways of transferring the uncleanness and how to solve the uncleanness
25-30	Uncleanness of a woman due to gynecological discharges
25	Basic description of the uncleanness
26-27	Ways of transferring the uncleanness and how to solve the uncleanness
28-30	The procedure for restoration when the discharge is healed
31-33	Conclusion
31	Concluding remarks
32-33	Summary

This structure is further simplified below to show the experiencer of uncleanness and the cause of uncleanness.

	<i>verses</i>	<i>experiencer of uncleanness</i>	<i>cause of uncleanness</i>
A	1-2a	all Israelites	(Introduction)
B	2b-15	all people	sickness, wound
C	16-17	male (adult)	result of normal life
D	18	male/female	result of normal life
C	19-24	female (adult)	result of normal life
B'	25-30	all female	sickness, gynecological disorder
A'	31-33	all Israelites	(Conclusion)

Obviously there is a chiasmic structure in the chapter. Yet, there is an apparent asymmetry in the identity of the experiencer of uncleanness, i.e. B “all people (male/female, young/old)” versus B' “all female (young/old).” However, these two units, B and B', can also be seen as having a symmetrical internal parallelism. The internal parallelism may be in that the female body is for pregnancy and childbirth. In this respect, the female body involves potentially both male and female, say literally when she is pregnant with a baby boy. For this reason the female body is relatively more complicated and sensitive than the male body, with higher possibility to contract sickness and experience discharges, or there are just more medical issues with women.²⁹⁾ This also may be the reason why the procedure of childbirth is stipulated separately in Lev 12 within the Manual of Purity (Lev 11-15). “All female” in vv. 25-30 refers to all the female population, both young and old regardless of menstruation.

6. Conclusion

Biblical scholars mostly interpret that Lev 15:2-15 deals with a discharge (זוב) from male sexual organs. This view may be rather simplistic as it is not based on a closer examination of the language of the text. When the four terms in the text—איש, בשר, זוב, and רקק—are examined with care, it is determined that the זוב in vv. 2-15 does not refer just to male genital discharges but to various kinds of mucous discharges stemming from the wounds or external/internal disorders, which should certainly include male genital discharges.

Leviticus 15 does not deal only with the discharge and uncleanness related to sexual organs. The chapter deals comprehensively with God’s measures to handle the problem of uncleanness among His people that results from both normal living and abnormal conditions. By observing these measures or laws the community of His people can minimize the transmission of uncleanness and maintain a hygienic

29) This may be the reason why there are the medical branches of gynaecology and obstetrics exclusively for women.

and healthy living.

Leviticus 15 constitutes the final part of the Manual of Purity in Leviticus. At the end, in 15:31, God told Moses and Aaron, והזרתם את בני ישראל מטמאתם ולא ימתו, בתמאתם, בטמאתם את־משכני אשר בתוכם “In this way you must warn the Israelites against uncleanness, in order that they may not die by bringing uncleanness upon the Tabernacle where I dwell among them.” Throughout Leviticus, God is portrayed as a God of holiness. Having been called to walk with such a holy God, Israelites were required to live a pure life both morally and physically. This chapter teaches how they can live such a pure life, practically handling the bodily discharges of both physiological and pathological nature.

* Keyword

discharge, uncleanness, Leviticus 15, geminite verbs, iconicity principles.

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<Abstract>

레위기 15장에 언급된 유출병의 특성

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이 연구의 목적은 레위기 15장, 특히 2-15절에 언급된 “유출병,” **בִּזְיָ**의 특성을 살펴보고 거기서 발견된 내용을 레위기 15장 전체를 이해하는 데 적용해 보고자 하는 것이다. 유출병의 성격을 확인하기 위해 본문에 대한 언어학적—통사론적, 텍스트언어학적, 어휘의미론적—분석 방법이 사용되었다. 이 방법은 본문에 나오는 네 용어에 적용되었다: **אִשׁ** (2, 5, 16, 18, 24, 33절), **בֶּשֶׂר** (2, 3, 7, 13, 16, 19절), **זֶבֶד** (2, 3, 13, 15, 19, 25, 26, 28, 30, 33절), **רִקָּק** (8절).

연구의 결과는 레위기 15:2-15 유출병의 성격에 대한 전통적 이해와는 다른 이해를 제시한다. 대부분의 해석자들은 **בִּזְיָ**가 남성 성기의 질환에 따른 분비물의 유출로 보는데, 이는 **אִשׁ**를 “남자”로 **בֶּשֶׂר**를 “생식기”로 이해한 결과이다. 그러나, 본문과 구약 히브리어 성경의 다른 관련 구문들을 자세히 관찰해보면 **אִשׁ**를 “사람(남녀 구분없이)”으로 **בֶּשֶׂר**를 “살, 몸”으로 이해하는 것이 더 적합함을 알 수 있다. 그러므로 본문에서 **בִּזְיָ**는 “남자든 여자든 질병으로 인해 사람의 몸에서 생긴 각종 체액의 분비”를 의미한다.

유출병 당사자가 남성이란 특성보다는 환자란 특성을 가짐은 레위기 15:8에 사용된 중복동사 **רִקָּק**에서 관찰된다. 이 동사는 일반적으로 “(입 속에서 밖으로 무언가를) 뱉다”를 뜻한다. 언어의 기호성의 원리(iconicity principles) 개념을 적용하고, 뿌리가 같은 동의어 **רָקַק** “(비반복적으로, 이따금씩) 뱉다”와 비교해 보면, **רִקָּק**는 “(반복적으로) 뱉다”로 이해된다. 이 뱉음의 반복성은 유출병 당사자가 앓는 호흡기 질환에 기인한다. 남자나 여자나 병든 사람이 반복적으로 내뱉는 분비물이라면 불결한 것이며, 단지 병든 남자가 뱉은 분비물만 불결하다 할 수는 없는 것이다.

나아가, 유출병의 특성에 대한 이 같은 이해는 여성의 출산 특성과 아울러 이해할 때 이 장 전체의 대칭적 내부구조를 좀더 선명히 드러내준다.